



OLDŘICH FRIS,
(7. V. 1903 — 14. I. 1955)

IN MEMORIAM OLDŘICH FRIŠ

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It was with deep regret that Czechoslovak Orientalists learned of the death, after a short illness, on January 14th, 1955, of Oldřich Friš, Ph. D., Professor of Indology at the Charles University, and editor of our journal "Archiv Orientální".

Oldřich Friš was born on May 7th, 1903, in the town of Boskovice in Moravia, as one of twelve children whom their father, Maximilian Friš, had a hard struggle to provide for.

Young Oldřich completed his secondary school studies in Boskovice, where he matriculated on June 24th, 1922, with honours. It was at school that his first interest was roused in the Old Indian language. In 1922, he became a student of the Philosophical Faculty in the Charles University in Prague. As his scientific interests had to yield to the need for earning his living as soon as possible, he chose Classical and Slavonic philology as his degree subjects but also regularly attended lectures on Indian history and language and on comparative Indo-European philology. He was fortunate to be able to hear Josef Zubatý, who had a decisive influence on his whole working method, its thoroughness and accuracy being features to which he remained faithful all his life. In addition, he attended lectures by Zubatý's successors, the authority on comparative Indo-European philology, Oldřich Hujer and the Indologist Vincenc Lesný. During his teacher's training, he also attended the lectures on Indian studies at the Prague German University, first of Otto Stein and then, after his return from India, of Moriz Winternitz, one of the last "universal Indologists" in Europe. In the years 1924—25, he studied in Berlin under Heinrich Lüders, Helmuth v. Glasenapp and Johannes Nobel, again deepening his knowledge of Indian history and language under these teachers.

After his return to Prague, Friš completed, in 1927, the prescribed course of study for a secondary school teacher. The high demands of his profession forced him to relegate his beloved Indian studies to a subordinate place in his working programme. In the school year 1928/29, he was sent for practical training to Strakonice where, for the first time, he was cut off from indological sources. The following year he finished his training in schools in Prague, and so was again able to attend tutorials with Prof. Lesný. On May 23rd, 1930, he passed the State Examination for Secondary School Teachers with Czech and Latin as his approved subjects. In 1930, he was appointed to a post in far-off Prešov. Fortunately, a year later, he



managed to exchange this post for one in Mělník beside Prague, so that up to 1933 he was able to continue his studies under Prof. Lesný. On September 1st, 1933, he was appointed to a post with full professional statutes in Tišnov in Moravia, where he remained till 1945. At this time he often complained, not without bitterness, that it was very difficult for him to continue his Indian studies as he had no access to the requisite literature and sources. He was thus obliged to travel into Prague which he could do only during holidays while, in any case, frequent visits were ruled out for financial reasons. An example of the difficulties under which he worked is that he found it necessary to copy whole Sanskrit texts in order to be independent of borrowing terms at the Libraries. But no obstacles could daunt him in his researches and in 1934, he even went to Paris in the summer vacation, where he again took advantage of the opportunity for wider research.

Not having adequate access to the sources to enable him to prepare indological scientific publications for the press, he set to work on a paper on Czech linguistics for which he had rich sources in Moravia and not so distant Slovakia. It was published in 1939 and will be given fuller mention below. A number of his translations from Ancient and Middle Indian literature also date from this period. Especially, however, during the gloom and terror of the Nazi occupation, he sought, like many others, escape from its horrors in the beauties of Indian literature and many of his translations, some published and others unpublished during his lifetime, were made in these unhappy years.

The liberation of our country in 1945 awoke in Friš new hopes which this time were not disappointed. The same year he moved to Prague where his teaching appointment was transferred. Now he was able to finish his thesis entitled "Sattasaī a její místo v indické lyrice" (Sattasaī and Its Place in the Indian Lyric). At the end of January 1946, he passed the Final Examinations in Indian History and Language and in Comparative Philology, and in March of the same year received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Friš, who had earlier sympathized with the programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, joined the Party in 1946. From then on he was an active Party member and, in spite of the immense tasks which he was called upon to fulfil as a scientific worker, translator and University teacher, he conscientiously carried out the duties which Party membership entailed. He placed his wide knowledge and experience unreservedly at the service of the reorganisation of places of higher education and of scientific institutes, and rendered valuable assistance not only in the form of advice but also did much strenuous spade-work in different functions.

After taking his degree, Friš continued his Indological studies and, at the same time, read intensively for his thesis qualifying him for teaching at the university. On the basis of his "Recense Amaruśataka" (The Recensions of the Amaruśataka), the Professorial Board of the Philosophical

Faculty in the Charles University approved his appointment, on May 13th, 1948, as "Privatdozent" in Indian Studies at the Charles University. The following semester he was entrusted with the lectures and tutorials in this department of the Philosophical Faculty of the Palacký University in Olomouc, where he completed the organisational and scientific set-up of a Department of Indian Studies and Comparative Philology which was later transferred from Olomouc to Prague and incorporated with the Department there.

In these years Friš took an active part in preparing a reform of Oriental Studies, and especially of Indian Studies, at our universities. It was mainly thanks to his initiative that the Modern Indian languages of Hindustani and Bengali were raised to the status of main subjects of study. Till then Modern Indian languages had no place in the curriculum of our universities.

On April 1st, 1950, Friš was relieved of his secondary school post and appointed Senior Assistant at the Philosophical Faculty of the Charles University. A year later, on May 1st, 1951, he was appointed Assistant Professor of Indology there, and from April 1st, 1952, he was made Deputy Head of the Department of History and Languages of the Near and Middle East and India. He filled this post till September 1st, 1954, when he became Dean of the Philological Faculty of the Charles University, having previously been appointed Professor. The double appointment awaited him on his return from England where he had been attending the International Congress of Orientalists held in Cambridge.

Friš's scientific qualification justified his appointment as Secretary to the scientific journal of the Oriental Institute in Prague, "Archiv Orientální" (Oriental Archives), in which capacity he assisted its Chief Editor, Bedřich Hrozný. After the death of Academician Hrozný, Friš took over, in 1953, the chief editorship of this journal in which he had published since 1947, and continued to publish till his death, the majority of his scientific papers.

After moving to Prague in 1945, Friš at once showed a lively interest in the rapidly expanding activities of the Oriental Institute and, as the interpreter in the Czech language of Indian literature, also in its work of popularisation; thus, in December 1946, he became a member of the Editorial Board of the magazine "Nový Orient" (The New Orient), which carries out this task evolving on the Oriental Institute. From April 1951 he was made Chief Editor, a position which he retained till his death. His collaboration contributed to raising both the technical and ideological level of the magazine in which he published numerous articles and translations, and it is due in no small measure to him that "Nový Orient" has an important place among the journals of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. From 1952 Friš was also a member of the Editorial Board of the art edition "Malá knižnice Orientu" (Bijou Oriental Library) published in conjunction with the magazine.

The Society for Cultural and Economic Relations with the Orient,

founded in 1945, also benefited from his helpful co-operation (both as a member of the Central Committee and of the Indian section) till its amalgamation with the Oriental Institute in 1952. He assisted in the Society's work of popularisation by giving a series of lectures for the general public. After the inauguration of the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledges, he also lectured for this institute.

In 1950, Friš was co-opted on to the Executive Committee of the Oriental Institute; after the setting up of a completely reorganized Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences on November 17th, 1952, he became a member of the Research Council of the Oriental Institute. As such, he made many valuable suggestions for the further consolidation and growth of scientific work in the field of Oriental studies in general and Indian studies in particular.

In his endeavour to make the greatest possible contribution to the tasks of construction in the fields of science and education, Friš made too great demands on his physical powers and he fell in the throes of battle, leaving behind him many high plans unrealized.

If we make a survey of Friš's published works, they naturally fall into several inter-related groups. Although the most important of these is undoubtedly the group comprising his Indian studies, we shall observe the chronological order and begin with his publications treating of Czech linguistics. His first scientific publication is an article entitled "Sodoma Gomora" (Naše řeč [Our Language] 22, 1938, 194—198), where he treats of asyndeta composed of two terms expressing a single idea. This question is then analysed very thoroughly in the article „O ustrnování rozšířených výrazů" (On the Fossilization of Co-ordinated Compounds [Listy filologické 66, 1939, 170—205]). He takes as his starting-point, O. Hujer's study "K nauce o asyndetu" (On the Problem of the Asyndeton) published in a Collection of Papers in honour of J. Zubatý, entitled "Mnema", Prague, 1925, pp. 159—174, and supplements it by a wealth of material from Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia, taken from a wide variety of authors and taking into consideration Indo-European affinities. But not even later, when Friš was able to devote himself fully to his Indian studies, did he give up his interest in this field, proof of which is the article "Zastírání a charakterisování rodu" (The Masking and Characterisation of Gender) in the Časopis pro moderní filologii (Journal of Modern Philology) 32, 1949, 67—69.

The transition from these themes to his Indian studies are Friš's papers on problems of comparative Indo-European linguistics. Noteworthy are two papers dealing with the problem of Indo-European comparison "The IE. Comparative" (ArOr 18, 1—2, 1950, 170—188) and "The IE. Comparative Suffix *-ios* and the Neuter Suffix *-os*" (ArOr 21, 1953, 101—113). To this group, too, belongs at least in part the article "Etymologische Forschungen" (ArOr 21, 1953, 175—181), where Friš treats of the Indo-European *du-*, the Vedic *yantúr* and the Avestan *akōyā*.

We come still closer to India in Friš's papers dealing with Avestan. Here we may mention the second part of the paper „Indo-Iranica" (ArOr

18, 3, 1950, 73—79), in which he discusses the Avestan word *rayō.nāmanā*, while the first part belongs to the field of Indian studies and essays to give a new and conclusive explanation of the riddle of the two birds on the Tree of Life RV I, 164, 20—22). The paper entitled “The Avestan Studies” (ArOr 19, 1951, 492—513) works out a more exact method of interpreting obscure passages in the Avesta and gives a number of examples illustrating his method. In another study, “Ein mißverständener Vers des Avesta” (ArOr 20, 1952, 598—600), Friš presents a new interpretation of Yt. 10, 38. The first instalment of what was to be a larger treatise is the paper “Die Stämme auf *-an* im Avesta” (ArOr 22, 1954, 38—62), in which Friš classifies and gives a re-evaluation of the whole existing material on roots in *-an*. Later papers were to analyse, among other things, the Old Indian roots in *-in*.

In the forefront of Friš's Indian studies is his “Sanskrtská čítanka” (Sanskrit Reader), Prague, 1954, for—except for his translations—it was his most important scientific work in book form. So far Sanskrit Readers had been compiled more or less along formal literary lines, without special attention to the content. An additional shortcoming for our students was also the fact that the vocabularies were always in a foreign language. Thus it was necessary to provide our young Orientalists with new textbooks with Czech vocabularies and glossaries. At the same time, Friš selected his texts not only to illustrate the whole range of Sanskrit literature, but so that their content would also give a connected survey of life and society in ancient India. As this new point of view is likely to awaken interest in the Reader abroad, the vocabulary, which was in the press at the time of Friš's death, will come out very soon as Part II of the Reader in four languages (Sanskrit-Czech-English-Russian).

At the head of the group of Friš's published papers and articles dealing with Indian studies, we shall mention those devoted to his great love, Indian belles-lettres. In connection with his thesis for his degree, two papers came out in 1947: “Notes on Hāla's Sattasaī” (ArOr 16, 1948 [sic], 89—91), and “Kořeny indické lyriky” (The Roots of the Indian Lyric) (NO 3, 1947/48, 2—3). The paper “Two Words from Amaruśataka” (ArOr 16, 1948, 92—95) was written as a marginal study for his inaugural academic dissertation, which came out under the title “The Recensions of the Amaruśataka” in ArOr 19, 1951, 125—176. On the basis of a thorough analysis of different readings of the various versions of Amaru's love lyrics as well as of the syntactical and stylistic variations, Friš comes to the conclusion that Text I is better than the others and is nearest the original. In connection with his work as a translator, Friš published in “The New Orient” an article entitled “O životě a díle Bilhanově” (On the Life and Work of the Kashmirian poet Bilhana) (NO 7, 1952, 156—157), and another “O Kālidāsovi” (On Kālidāsa) (NO 8, 1953, 123—124). An informative article for a wider circle of readers appeared under the title “Klasické drama v Indii” (Classical Drama in India) (NO 6, 1951, 196—200).

On the basis of the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, Friš began to take an interest in Indian materialist philosophy which was severely suppressed by orthodox Brahmin circles. The fruit of this was a study "O indickém materialismu" (On Indian Materialism) (NO 6, 1951, 77—79), and he planned a work on the philosophy of the Upaniṣads, which he wished to re-evaluate with the help of dialectical materialism. The only preparatory study for this work was an article entitled "Myšlení v pěticích (Základy učení upanišad)" (Thinking in Groups of Five—The Basic Principles of the Upaniṣad Doctrine) (NO 6, 1951, 166—168); lack of time evidently prevented him from continuing work on this theme. Here we may also mention a planned series of articles on ancient Indian science, of which only one paper "K dějinám indické matematiky" (A Contribution to the History of Indian Mathematics) (NO 10, 1955, 25) appeared.

Thus Friš, the philologist and literary historian, began to explore philosophical and historical themes. Earlier Friš had devoted some attention to the history of Czech relations with India in the article "České lodě připlouvají z Indie" (Czech Ships Sail Back from India) (Výstava orientální knihy [Exhibition of Oriental Books], Prague, 1948, pp. 13—19). In this connection, too, we may mention his survey "Česká orientalistika v roce 1952" (Czech Oriental Studies in 1952) (NO 7, 1952, 158—159) and a number of articles on the life and work of Academician Vincenc Lesný, published on different occasions (NO 2, 5, 1946/47, 3—4; 7, 1952, 69—71; 8, 1953, 73; ArOr 21, 1953, 25—26; Věstník ČSAV [Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences Gazette] 62, 1953, 103—108, and others). Friš also dealt with highly topical themes (for instance "Osvobozenecký boj v Orientě" [The Struggle for National Liberation in the Orient] NO 7, 1952, 1) and had also made an approach to the history of the Indian social structure from the point of view of historic materialism. He first made contact with this branch of Indian studies when collaborating with the Czech translator of the English book by the Indian author, S. A. Dange, entitled "Indie od praprimu k otroctví" ("India from Primitive Communism to Slavery"), which was published in Prague, in 1950. In the Glossary and Notes which he compiled for the book, he tried to make it more understandable for the general reader and corrected some of the author's statements which were not in accord with the indubitable results of Indian research. The fruit of Friš's study of the history of Indian society were the articles "Hospodářský základ jednoho náboženského zvyku" (The Economic Base of a Religious Custom) (NO 6, 1951, 52—53), in which he sought to revise the views so far put forward as to the origin of the fourth Āśrama in India, and "Otrokářský řád ve staré Indii" (The Slave System in Ancient India) (NO 8, 1953, 56—58), in which he gives a useful survey of this much-disputed problem, as well as the script for University students, "Struktura staroindické společnosti" (The Structure of Ancient Indian Society), Prague, 1953. This work, written to meet urgent pedagogical needs, is characteristic

of the uncompromising integrity with which Friš approached all the tasks of his profession. If he was to lecture to his students on how ancient Indian society developed and was organised, then he could not be satisfied with a mere compilation of existing works, as many another would have been, especially when he was so pressed for time. Friš, on the contrary, set to work to write a new study based on his immensely wide reading of ancient Indian sources. The work opens up many new avenues of approach which he wished later to explore and sum up in a comprehensive scientific work, giving a synthetic view of ancient Indian society based on Marxist principles. This plan, too, however remained unrealized as the result of his untimely death.

The greatest service which Friš rendered to Czech culture was, however, as a translator of ancient Indian Sanskrit and Prākṛit literature. Czech literature possessed its translations of ancient Indian literature from the original sources from last century. But it was Friš's translation which stripped these works of all academic dullness and obscurity and enabled the Czech reader to enjoy their beauty to the full. In them, Friš showed himself to be not only an outstanding expert on ancient Indian literature and Sanskrit, but also a master of the expressive means of the Czech language. He succeeded in rendering in his mother tongue all the rich poetic beauty of the original in as far as it is at all possible. Except for one work which he translated in collaboration with the gifted Czech poet, František Hrubín, he gave all the others poetic form himself.

Friš began to publish his translations even before 1945. They comprised occasional poems published for the most part in *Lidové noviny*. The first book of translations, however, appeared after the liberation of Czechoslovakia, as it was not possible to publish them during the Nazi occupation. The translator's interest was not confined either to certain literary forms or to certain periods. On the contrary! One of his first collections of translations to be published consisted in a selection from the hymns and proverbs of Ṛgveda and Atharvaveda under the title „Védské hymny“ (Vedic Hymns), Prague, 1948. Though the book contained only twenty-two poems, Friš showed such skill in their selection and rendering into Czech verse that they give a remarkably complete picture of the mythological conceptions and life of the Vedic Aryans. The Sanskrit epos enjoyed fuller treatment. As a separate publication of the Editorial Board of *The New Orient*, there appeared in 1949 „*Soucitná smrt*“ (Compassionate Death) (Mahābhārata XII, 256), and, in the same year, in *The New Orient*, (5, 1949/50, 62—63) a translation of extracts from the story of the Flood, also from the Mahābhārata. Among Friš's largest translations is, however, his rendering into verse of Rāmāyaṇa, which will soon appear posthumously. Friš, as a notable authority and a sensitive poet, abridged the work to make it more suitable for the European reader, without impairing its beauty.

Despite the fact that the translation of the second largest Sanskrit epos represents a monumental work, it is not in epic that we must seek the

crowning glory of Friš's work as a translator. His greatest masterpieces are his Czech renderings of Sanskrit and Prākṛit lyrics. These translations arose in connection with Friš's scientific work. Thus in 1947 a small collection appeared under the title "Sattasaī" (Prague, 1947) comprising 57 verses, but a large number of unpublished verses have been preserved in his literary legacy. Several appeared singly in *The New Orient*. In the course of work on his inaugural dissertation "The Recensions of Amaruśataka" there arose the translation of Amaru's Love Poems, which has not so far been published. Friš did not, however, limit himself to these two collections. The Indian lyric was, along with philology, his favourite subject and in it he found the fullest satisfaction of his aesthetic sense. Thus he has left behind, among his unpublished works, enchanting translations of almost the whole body of Bhartṛhari's lyrical poetry, of which only a few samples have so far been published in an anthology of ancient Indian lyrics entitled "Láska a odříkání" (Love and Renunciation), Prague, 1948. This collection contains in addition to the verses of Bhartṛhari, mainly translations from Sanskrit anthologies, examples of the lyrics of Kālidāsa and Jayadeva and the Buddhist lyrics from the Theragāthā collection. In collaboration with State Prize Laureate František Hrubín, he published a translation of Bilhaṇa's Caurīsuratapañcāśikā under the title "Dnes ještě..." (Yet Today...), Prague, 1953. Friš prefaced the translation with a short literary study of Bilhaṇa's poetry, which showed that the author had grasped not only the emotional depth and the high art of the translated works but also had a thorough knowledge of the social conditions under which this literature arose. This was equally apparent in Friš's crowning achievement as a translator — in his rendering of Kālidāsa's Meghadūta, published under the traditional Czech title of "Oblak poslem lásky" (The Cloud — the Messenger of Love), Prague, 1954, under which the first Czech translation of this work came out, made by Josef Zubatý nad Jaromír Borecký at the beginning of the century. Friš also produced an equally masterly translation into verse of Kālidāsa's R̥tusamhāra, which is due for publication next year, and of Aja's Lamentation for Indumatī, from the epos Raghuvamśa. These translations are of a perfection that it would be difficult to surpass in the Czech language. Before his death, there came out, in a private art edition, a translation of two Indian legends ("Z indických legend"), Prague, 1954. They are the legends "The Good King" from the Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa (published also in NO 9, 1954, 116—117) and "Short-lived Happiness" from the Brahmapurāṇa (ibid. 10, 1955, 12—13). Completing the large collection of Friš's verse translations is a set of about five hundred gnomic verses selected from Böhrtlingk's collection "Indische Sprüche", of which only a few examples appeared in *The New Orient*. Friš was so impressed by Indian wisdom that he translated, among other things, several hundred aphorisms from Vallabhadeva's Collection "Subhāṣitāvali".

Friš made a study not only of ancient Indian poetry but also of prose. In this branch of literature, the only translation to be completed was the

"*Vetālapañcaviṃśatikā*" which will come out next year under the title "Démonovy povídky" (The Demon's Tales). Friš's work as a translator is very comprehensive and perhaps no Indian scholar has done so much for propagating a knowledge of Indian literature in his country as he did in his comparatively short life. He translated a wide variety of works from Sanskrit and yet always managed to preserve the specific qualities of the original and the characteristic period style. Czech culture has lost in him a man who, more than any before him, has made it possible for our Czech readers to become acquainted with one of the world's greatest literatures—Indian literature. A full evaluation of his work as a translator will, however, only be possible after a thorough sifting of his unpublished work which promises many a surprise.

Another aspect of Oldřich Friš's character was the readiness with which he shared his knowledge and experience with all those who sought his advice or help. And these were not only his colleagues and students. Friš had a lively interest in all other branches of Oriental studies, whether philology, linguistics, literary science or history. Especially his students, however, whom he looked upon as his co-workers, were able to draw upon his inexhaustible store of knowledge. He gave deep and careful consideration to every problem which they brought to him and never grudged the time he devoted to its study. He read the work of his students with a teacher's interest and always gave helpful advice and criticism. In this field, too, Friš's untimely death cut short his valuable work in bringing up a new generation of scholars, and here more than in any other field of his activity we have suffered an irreparable loss. During the short time which he carried on his work as a university teacher, he had only a small number of pupils and to these he could give only the basic introduction to independent scientific work.

Czechoslovak Oriental studies as a whole have lost in Friš an outstanding scholar, translator, adviser and teacher and, above all, a fine and lovable man who created a warm and friendly atmosphere of mutual understanding and common effort in raising Czech scholarship to an ever higher level as part of the great task of national construction.
